

## Town Plans to Buy St. Margaret's Field

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Town officials are poised to sign an agreement with the Society of St. Margaret's convent to purchase the open field on Washington St. and to buy the development rights to an adjoining lot to preserve the existing landscape.

"It's going to be our new town green for the Millennium," said Patricia Loring, chairman of the Open Space Committee, who, with other town officials, has been negotiating for over eight months with St. Margaret's to purchase this land.

Last week, the order of Episcopal nuns put a 1.8 acre waterfront lot on Washington St. on the open market for \$1.3 million. This lot is accessed by a driveway on the corner of the property near the early 20th century farmhouse. It is being brokered by LandVest of Boston.

The sisters are seeking to raise money through these sales to preserve the rest of their 13.17 acres, which border Washington St., Harden Hill Rd and Duxbury bay. There is a town landing at the end of Harden Hill Rd.

"The Society of St. Margaret's is going to take the money from these sales and they are going to put together an endowment to protect and maintain their Duxbury property," said Loring. "They hope to never sell anything again.

Their goal is to protect the property. The endowment will provide an income stream to maintain the existing buildings."

Since the team of Duxbury officials is in negotiations with St. Margaret's, Loring said she could not yet release the costs of the Washington St. lot or the conservation restrictions. The property would be bought with both public and private funds, said Loring. Town meeting will be involved at some point.

The field the town wants to buy is used now by youths for impromptu Frisbee games and by the Girl Scouts for a day camp in the summer. It would remain open space and be used for passive recreation and landscaped as a park, said Loring. Any special events held there would require consent from the sisters of St. Margaret's.

The town also wants to purchase conservation restrictions on the majority of the acreage seen from Washington St., which would prevent any future development there, yet the sisters would retain ownership of the land. The Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts would jointly hold this restriction with the Duxbury Conservation Commission.

"The view that people see as they travel down Washington St. will change very little," explained Loring.

By buying the lot and devel-

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opment rights, the town furthers its goals of protecting the existing view and obtaining a town green, explained Loring, and St. Margaret's meets its objective of raising money to preserve its property. Loring called the idea "a win-win solution."

The Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts will also hold a conservation restriction on the Washington St. field to ensure it stays open. According to Loring, this is a usual practice: "Today, you often have two organizations split that responsibility. The thinking is that if one of them goes under the land would remain as the seller intended."

In October 1999, the *Clipper* reported that the town was considering buying both the conservation restrictions and a waterfront lot. When asked why the town changed its focus, Loring said: "Without getting the whole waterfront, getting one waterfront lot would

not be a good way of spending town money."

The Society of St. Margaret bought the property in 1904 when it was the Wadsworth farm. For many years, the nuns used the property only in the summer and ran an overnight

camp for inner-city children until the 1960s. Now, they live in a home there year-round and use some of the buildings for retreats for clergy.

The Society of St. Margaret is based in Roxbury and has approximately 50 sisters.

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